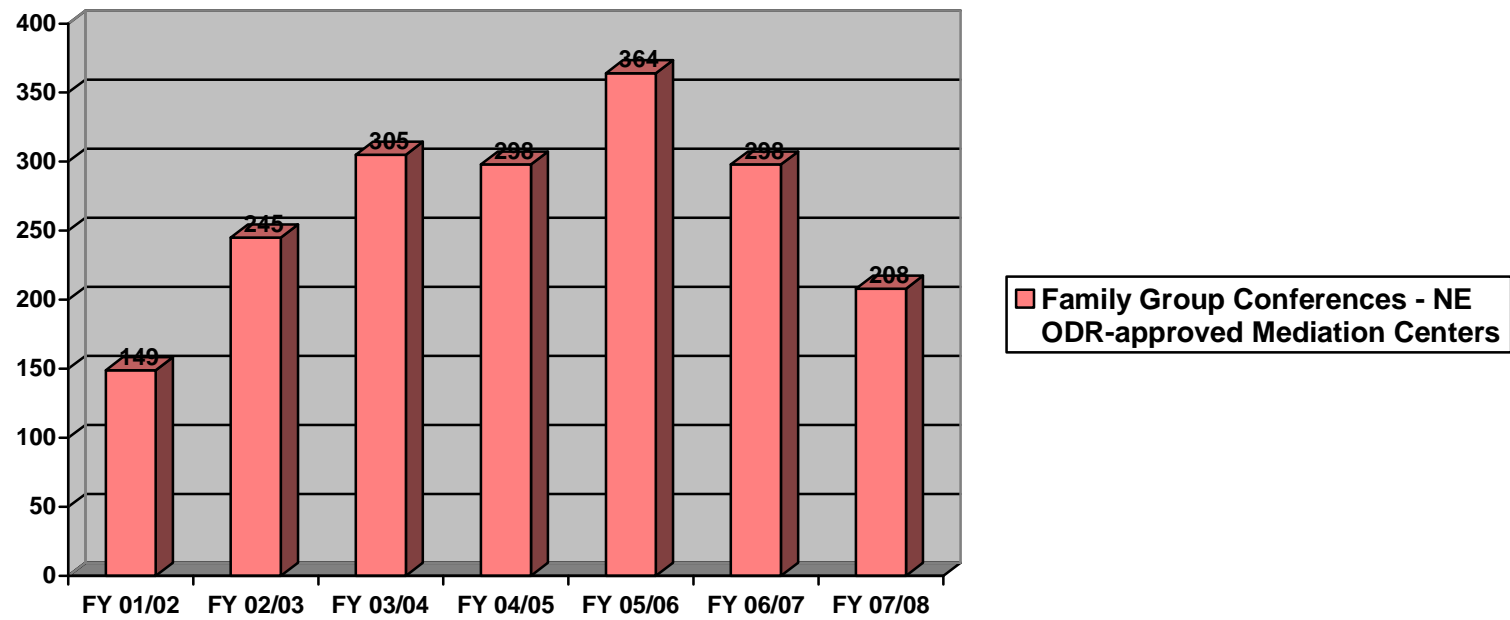




**Nebraska Family Group Conference Case Statistics
and Children's Stories
July 1, 2001 through June 30, 2008
Nebraska ODR-approved Mediation Centers**

Nebraska's ODR-approved mediation centers, in partnership with Nebraska Health and Human Services, have been providing Family Group Conferencing (FGC) for children and their families since 2001 as a statewide service. FGC as a pilot project was delivered in the late 1990's in Red Willow, Keith, Scotts Bluff, and Dodge Counties. **FGC offers a child-centered approach for decision making around a child's safety, permanency, and well-being** for children involved in the legal system, particularly in child abuse and neglect cases and juvenile justice matters. This process is based on the belief that families and communities must partner together to ensure the best outcomes for children. **FGC is a facilitated process** whose goal is to create a child-centered **family plan** for the child's safety and future permanency. A qualified FGC Coordinator, proficient in conflict resolution strategies and family conferencing decision-making, spends up to 30 to 40 hours in preparation in working with children, their parents, other kinship members, friends, and child welfare members to prepare them for up-to-a full-day gathering (yes, including a meal) to talk about critical issues, explore strengths and concerns for the child and family. The FGC process **allows for private family time for decision-making**, prior to the last phase of the conference which reality-tests the family plan in regard to the child safety issues. Nebraska's FGC model is adapted from the Maori indigenous people of New Zealand, and as taught to Nebraska ODR mediators by the American Humane Association (see americanhumane.org). Nebraska FGC was initiated by the Administrative Office of the Court's Court Improvement Project with the Nebraska Center for Children, Families, and the Law.

Family Group Conference Referral case type	FY 01-02	FY 02-03	FY 03-04	FY 04-05	FY 05-06	FY 06-07	FY 07-08
Neglect/Abuse	109	179	243	232	289	225	178
Adoption	4	1	2	6	5	1	1
Juvenile	19	48	31	32	50	43	10
Other	17	17	29	28	20	29	19
Totals	149	245	305	298	364	298	208



Children and Families' Stories

It is the stories of children and families that give the best picture of the success of family group conferencing. Below are four stories of children and families who participated in Nebraska's Family Group Conferencing, provided by FGC Coordinators affiliated with the ODR-approved regional non-profit mediation centers. Some of the details have been changed to protect confidentiality.

- a) Drug bust in home**— two very young children put in foster care while Mom got treatment (Dad put in jail for drugs before FGC follow-up session)
 - o FGC Session resulted in a Family Plan to reunify the children with mom after she successfully completed drug treatment
 - o Plan included the children visiting with Dad's side of the family
 - o FGC Follow-up: Mom and children doing well; Mom has remarried, children still in contact with paternal side of family
 - o Case dismissed several years ago
 - o Plan still being followed over three years later

- b) Orphaned children in foster care.** The family's father had died several years prior to the FGC, then the mother committed suicide. The four orphan children were placed in foster care. FGC Coordinators identified children's relatives from five different states who were talked with and agreed to travel to Nebraska to attend the FGC which occurred in 2000.
 - o Family members in the FGC session mutually agreed upon a plan in which an aunt from southern United States took guardianship of the children
 - o The Plan was implemented
 - o One year later, the entire family came together for a family reunion and discovered that the children were very unhappy with placement
 - o The mediation center convened another FGC (2001); all the extended family members agreed on change of custody to different relative in another state
 - o Children left NE to go with those relatives
 - o This new placement is ongoing and is successful

- c) Sexual abuse of child**
 - o During private family time, family discovered many secrets
 - o The family decided to tell the HHS case manager that the child was not safe with any family members
 - o The Family's proposed Plan for Guardianship to non-family member was agreed upon by HHS and family members

- d) Voluntary family group conference case referred by judge regarding a 16 year-old pregnant teen**
 - o Probation officer attended to represent the state's interests
 - o Family members, the 16 year-old, family friends and other community members participated
 - o Plan called for 16 year old pregnant teen to move to another community and live with mother
 - o With support from family, the teen mom, the father, and baby now are living on their own
 - o Neither the teen mom or baby became state wards